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****GeaSphere Champions Biochar as a Sustainable Solution for South Africa's Timber Industry****

ReWild Mpumalanga Project Leads the Way in Promoting Environmental Sustainability and Biodiversity Restoration

****Mpumalanga, South Africa**** – GeaSphere, an environmental advocacy organization based in Mpumalanga, is spearheading an innovative effort to transform the South African timber industry by promoting the production and use of biochar—a sustainable, carbon-sequestering alternative to the harmful practice of burning harvesting residues in the field.

Biochar production was initiated by GeaSphere as a strategic effort to manage the 'waste material' generated through their land restoration activities, particularly in controlling invasive plants and bush encroachment. This sustainable approach to waste management not only addresses environmental concerns but also unlocks the potential of biochar to contribute significantly to soil health and climate change mitigation.

Biochar, a stable form of carbon produced from organic waste material through pyrolysis, offers a multitude of environmental benefits, particularly when applied to soil. It enhances soil structure, increases water retention, and supports microbial communities that are crucial for maintaining healthy ecosystems. Moreover, biochar production captures carbon that would otherwise be released as CO₂ during traditional burning practices, effectively sequestering it in the soil and contributing to climate change mitigation.

Philip Owen, the driving force behind GeaSphere and the ReWild Mpumalanga project, explains: "The current practice of burning harvesting residues in the timber industry not only emits vast amounts of CO₂, contributing to climate change, but it also damages the soil, making it less capable of absorbing moisture. This increases soil erosion and leads to the siltation of our local river systems, a problem that has become all too evident in recent years."

GeaSphere's ReWild Mpumalanga project is dedicated to restoring ecosystems, controlling invasive plant species, and promoting biodiversity. With access to 100 part-time workers, the project is actively developing the capacity among local communities to produce artisan biochar using the ancient 'flame-capped' method. This method is not only efficient but also adaptable to the unique challenges of South Africa's forestry landscapes, particularly in areas where mechanical mulching is not feasible due to steep slopes and mountainous terrain.

"In addition to its environmental benefits, biochar production has the potential to create new economic opportunities in rural areas," says Owen. "By training local communities in biochar production, we can generate jobs, develop new skills, and contribute to the long-term sustainability of the timber industry."

GeaSphere is now calling on the South African timber industry to adopt biochar production as a standard practice for managing harvesting residues. The organization has been in discussions with key industry stakeholders and is urging the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) to revise their principles and criteria to incorporate and promote biochar as a sustainable alternative to in-field burning.

Owen emphasizes that "ultimately, more appropriate biodiversity is the key to sustainability." By integrating biochar into the management of timber plantations, the industry can take a significant step toward restoring and protecting South Africa's precious ecosystems, ensuring a more resilient and sustainable future for all.

The ReWild Mpumalanga project, supported by various partners including Project Biome, AvoVision, and WESSA Lowveld, is committed to driving this change. The project is not only focused on biochar but also on broader land restoration efforts, including combating invasive species and enhancing biodiversity across the region.

As GeaSphere continues to advocate for the adoption of biochar and sustainable practices in the timber industry, the organization invites support from all sectors of society. Together, we can work towards a future where our natural resources are managed responsibly, and where biodiversity and environmental health are prioritized.

For more information or to support the ReWild Mpumalanga project, please contact:

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****About GeaSphere****

GeaSphere is an environmental advocacy organization dedicated to land restoration, biodiversity conservation, and promoting sustainable practices in the forestry and agricultural sectors. The ReWild Mpumalanga project is a flagship initiative aimed at restoring ecosystems, controlling invasive species, and fostering community-based conservation efforts in Mpumalanga, South Africa.

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